

**APPENDIX F
TOWNHALL MEETING
QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, AND COMMENTS**

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, AND COMMENTS (Q, A, C)

Q: We understand that the Border Patrol will acquire several hundred acres. What would the buffer zone consist of? [Site 1]

A: Right now the Border Patrol is only considering the forty-four acres.

Q: One site at Sean Haggerty is close to a school and surrounded by residences. [Site 3] Wouldn't that be against Border Patrol policy? The other site at Hondo Pass - if you start nibbling at Castner Range, it will continue. [Site 1] The site at 54 and McCombs is the best site and is easily accessible. [Site 2]

A: The criteria regarding churches and schools not being near a site are part of the equation - they are not absolutes.

Q: Why are you spending taxpayers' money to clear Castner Range when there are perfectly good pieces of desert available? [Site 1]

A: The cost of clearing Site 1 would offset the real estate costs of purchasing from a private landowner. The land is no cost to the taxpayer except for the costs of clearing the site.

Q: Who makes the decision - the Army or Congress? [Site 1]

A: The Department of the Army would make the decision.

Q: Is there a map of the three sites?

A: A map is on display in the back of the room, and we will add it to the list of action items.

Q: Could we have a show of hands to see what the preference is here?

A: We are here to hear your concerns, not to simply take a vote.

C: Castner Range is biologically, ecologically and scientifically an important site. [Site 1] The site at McCombs and 54 is known to birders as Hawk Alley, and is extremely

important for migratory and breeding birds. [Site 2] Prefers Site 3, despite the presence of the school. Opposition is not just based on aesthetics.

C: Would like to see Castner Range as part of the State Park and Texas State Parks would love to have it. [Site 1]

Q: What guarantees do we have that this will not be a detention facility?

A: The detention facility is run by a sister agency that is not affiliated with the Border Patrol. The detention facility falls under the Bureau of Customs and Immigration Enforcement and will remain at the Montana Avenue site. Vacating the Montana Avenue site will leave more room for the detention facility. The detention facility needs to be centrally located in El Paso due to the volume of visitor traffic. In addition, at the current location, the detention facility is close to Immigration Courts and Services.

Q: Why are the other sites 100 acres [Sites 2 and 3] and Castner range in 44 acres? [Site 1]

A: To accommodate the Border Patrol and Sector Headquarters, the facilities would require a minimum of forty acres. The Public Service Board process is to indicate availability of land in parcels that are at least as large as the site requested. In this case the two parcels offered were larger. However, the Border Patrol can purchase only the acreage required.

Q: Who owns the other sites? [Sites 2 and 3]

A: El Paso Utilities Public Service Board, which is an entity of the City of El Paso.

Q: The drawing does not show the scale. How much of the site would be hardscaped? Castner Range is important as a watershed.

A: The scale is fairly accurate. Out of 40 acres, there would be room for 1100 parking spaces?

Q: 1100 parking spaces?

A: Correction - closer to 300 parking spaces.

Q: We've heard that clearance would be required to a depth of three feet and would be very expensive? Is that correct? [Site 1]

A: At this point, remediation would be less than the purchase cost of another site.

Q: Will the PSB sell the land? [Sites 2 and 3]

A: The PSB would have to have an appraisal of the land to determine a fair purchase price.

Q: I agree that the Park should be saved. With 1100 parking spaces, what will the temperature differential be?

A: Number of parking spaces was corrected – it is closer to 300 parking spaces.

Q: Why did you not consider Biggs Field?

A: Nothing was available in Biggs Field.

Q: The progress of this project seems so slow – how is it compared to other Border Patrol construction? What are the costs of delay?

A: This project is in line with other Border Patrol construction projects. Finding real estate in El Paso is more of a challenge than in a less developed area. It took one year to develop the requirements and do a real estate survey. In addition, it took two years to get funding. We also took time to ensure environmental compliance.

Q: Is the Environmental Assessment process taking longer than average?

A: No, One and a half years is about average.

Q: Are Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements¹ required in other areas?

¹ Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements are two different requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act

A: Yes, compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is always required.

Q: How do you assess the ecological integrity of a site?

A: We will add this to the action item list.

Q: What weight does the ecological integrity of a site carry in the final decision?

A: We will add this to the action item list.

Q: I keep listening for it, everyone is dancing so well – how much would the PSB sites cost? [Sites 2 and 3]

A: The land would require an appraisal, but PSB recently sold a 50 acre property for \$22,000/acre.

Q: What are the clearance costs? [Site 1]

A: The full costs have not yet been established. There are two types of actions for this type of work – clearance means going sub-surface to clean up and removal is clean up on the surface. The concern here is not the entire Castner Range.

Q: It is sad that nobody can answer the gentleman's question about the percentage impact of ecological integrity and that the border Patrol did a promotion – everybody in El Paso knows what the Border Patrol does, but hardly any time was spent on the three sites.

A: We are not trying to avoid this question on ecological integrity, but the NEPA document will address that question well. Also, the presentation by the Border Patrol is an important part of the process – purpose and need are extremely important in the NEPA document.

Q: What type of lighting will be used at your facility?

A: Lighting will be used to provide security around the facility. Rep. Cook also added that any lighting would be subject to new Dark Skies Ordinance under consideration by El Paso City Council.

Q: What is the NEPA process and what kind of public involvement will there be?

A: The NEPA process is ongoing. Public involvement is important to us. We will take all comments and concerns into account in that process as it moves forward.

Q: Who picked the sites? Have you considered land by the airport, on Yarborough, north of Montana? There is real concern about all three sites.

A: Land by the airport is not within our station and would only increase our distance from the border.

Q: Above question was repeated.

A: The El Paso Station has three hundred agents in a facility built for 150. Montana Ave. at Yarborough is further east than the operational responsibility of the Station, which covers 8.6 miles along the border. The Eastern boundary is McRae, and the Station is already on the far Eastern edge of our area of responsibility. To move by the airport would increase travel time to the border. Keep in mind that we didn't start with three sites in the Northeast. We did an exhaustive site survey (21 sites) and eliminated all but three based on lack of availability or cost or size. North of Montana is not feasible.

C: We here in the Northeast are excited to have the Border Patrol Agents up here – best food anywhere in the City. Glad to have more law enforcement up here, making it a safer place for families.

C: It's no problem to site these facilities near schools, since the aim is to keep drugs out of schools, seems like it would be a good thing. I'd rather have a neighbor who is a Border Patrol Agent than a drug dealer. However, this is more than about money – can't put a price tag on Castner Range – as homeowner I'd rather pay more taxes to protect Castner Range.

C: I support having the Border Patrol facilities in the Northeast. I'm happy they have multiple options to choose from, not just one site. I love the mountains too, but don't think the Border Patrol would be taking anything from the Northeast.

Q: El Paso has total disregard for its natural treasures, including the mountains. Is any place in the Franklin Mountains off limits? The mountains are what gives El Paso its identity.

A: Ft. Bliss is the caretaker of Castner Range, which is a Federal site. Castner Range cannot be used now for your protection. Keep in mind that this meeting is not about Castner Range but about the Border Patrol. The Border Patrol is concerned about retaining the natural beauty of the area through natural landscaping and building, which will fit in the surrounding community.

Q: You mean like the museum? [Border Patrol Museum, on Transmountain Road]

A: The museum was not built by the Border Patrol.

C: Protect the natural beauty –don't let concerns about economic development and education dictate decisions.

Q: What is the cost of the other two sites? [Sites 2 and 3]

A: Another similar site was recently sold by the Public Service Board for \$22,000/acre.

Q: If you have not already chosen Castner Range then why is that the only map that is provided on your display? [Site 1]

A: We recognized that Site 1 is the most controversial site and wanted to show a map to promote better understanding of what the project might look like within the context of Castner Range, to show that it is not unattractive.

Q: How many officers will be housed at the new facility?

A: The plan is for 350 agents to be based out of the new facility

Q: What is the time frame?

A: After the NEPA process is complete, design and construction requires two years.

Q: What is the Border Patrol's preferred site?

A: The Border Patrol's preference is the site which gives us the most operational advantages, the location most convenient to the Border, and the most for our limited funds.

Q: Are any of the three sites quicker, easier or cheaper to develop?

A: The length of time will depend on NEPA, which has to be finished before design and construction can begin. However, free land is preferable. Money that is spent on this project will benefit El Paso – which will be approximately \$60 million between the two facilities.

Q: Won't it be cumbersome to have to transport people to the current detention facility from one of the proposed new sites – won't it increase the amount of time and gas? Won't that have a negative impact on air quality to have to drive further to the detention facility?

A: Most apprehensions made in El Paso Station's area of responsibility are processed at the Paso del Norte port of entry (at Oregon and Border Highway). Any detainees are to be held at the detention center can be transported directly to it, not increasing mileage whatsoever.

C: The Border Patrol provides a wonderful service to our community and I'm for any site that will give them the operational advantages they need.

C: City Representative Cook is working with Congressman Reyes to clear Castner Range (\$25 million price tag was erroneous) in order to have that land turned over to the State.

C: Why not pick the most obvious site – the one you have a picture of? Establish a way for the people opposed to it to agree on what would make it work, like giving some land to Texas to turn it into a park for wildlife protection. Then put in a buffer zone along Gateway South and Hondo Pass to protect the animals that get hit. Get in touch with the Army – if looking at forty-four acres, why not get the land that everyone wants so badly?
[Site 1]

- C: We need a compromise. This would offer controlled development – low profile buildings. Wouldn't have the same control over a residential area. Then make sure the rest of Castner Range is saved for the Park. [Site 1]
- C: The things we showed in the presentation, such as helicopters, ATVs and horses, are activities that take place on the border. Let me reiterate that the majority of functions are administrative and these facilities will not be used for detention. In a rare case we would keep a juvenile overnight (for their safety) if we couldn't contact the parents in time. 99% of detainees are processed downtown and returned to the border. The few longer term detainees are taken to the detention facility (for criminal offenders, for example.) This decision about which site to use is beyond the El Paso Station and Sector – it will be decided at Headquarter in Washington, DC. El Paso Border Patrol is not in control of their destiny – they gave their requirements for a new facility and the rest is not their decision.

ACTION ITEMS

Q: Request copy of map.

A: Maps were sent to all participants the week of July 1, 2003

Q: How do you determine ecological integrity of a site?

A: This will be addressed in the Environmental Assessment.

Q: How much weight does that carry in final decision?

A: This will be addressed in the Environmental Assessment.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS (NOT ADDRESSED AT MEETING)

Q: Why is it reasonable to spend 40 million dollars on a site when other sites would be more economical to propose?

A: The \$40 million dollar figure is for clearance of the entire 7,000 acres of Castner Range, which includes highlands that would be difficult to clear. If Site 1 were chosen, the Border Patrol would be responsible for clearing 44 acres, which would be a much lower cost.

Q: Who will pay for the 40 million needed to clear up the site from explosives?

A: The \$40 million dollar figure is for clearance of the entire 7,000 acres of Castner Range, which includes highlands that would be difficult to clear. If Site 1 were chosen, the Border Patrol would be responsible for clearing 44 acres, which would be a much lower cost.

Q: Site 1 – Why isn't this the deal of the century for this site?

A: Site 1 would be a free Federal agency to Federal agency transfer, and costs incurred would be those required to clean it up, which at this point would cost less than the cost of purchasing land for Sites 2 or 3.

Q: Why do you want to destroy the mountain which should be a tourist attraction and is the only site where poppies grow?

A: Site 1 is located below the dam, near the intersection of Hondo Pass and Gateway South (next to the Texas Department of Transportation facility). The poppy field is further North along Gateway South. Site 1 is not located in the Franklin Mountains.